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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 VILNIUS 000358

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/NB, EUR/RPM (SWANDERSON), EUR/PM (SKWAK)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/05/2015

TAGS: [MOPS](#) [MCAP](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [LH](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: LITHUANIAN-LED PRT: TAKING SHAPE

REF: A. VILNIUS 257

[B](#). VILNIUS 198

[C](#). VILNIUS 103

Classified By: Political/Economic Officer Alexander Titolo for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Foreign Affairs and Defense Ministry officials told State POLAD designee to the Lithuania-led PRT Michael Metrisko March 30 - April 1 that Lithuania is moving forward with plans to lead a multinational provincial reconstruction team in Chaghcharan, Afghanistan. The Lithuanians, some just back from a reconnaissance mission to Chaghcharan, were confident that they will establish a base camp before the onset of winter. On April 2, the MFA provided a copy of an updated (but still notional) list for SHAPE detailing Lithuania's resource requirements to establish and sustain the PRT, based on their new understanding of the PRT site. Metrisko counseled the Lithuanians on the composition of their team, the establishment of PRT goals, and the challenges they will face in Western Afghanistan. The way forward includes coordination of the PRT players -- both the interagency players within Lithuania and multilaterally through SHAPE. END SUMMARY.

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The Mission  
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[1](#)2. (C) MOD Undersecretary Renatas Norkus defined the PRT's goal as "helping the Ghawr provincial government connect to the Karzai central government." Over the course of three days of meetings with Michael Metrisko, Norkus and others acknowledged that the mission would initially focus on security and gradually expand to civil reconstruction and development projects. Norkus was candid about the MOD's lack of experience with this type of work and the need for USAID and U.S. State assistance and resources to execute such projects.

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Deployment Timeline  
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[1](#)3. (C) Lt. Col. Gintautas Zenkevicius, whom the GOL has designated as commander for the initial PRT deployment, expressed confidence that initial operations will begin in mid- or late June and that the PRT would be fully operational by mid October. Norkus said that Lithuania had preliminary commitments from the UK to provide language training prior to deployment. Metrisko met with Zenkevicius on March 31, one day after the Lithuanian commander had returned from Afghanistan. Raising various challenges of operating in Ghawr Province, Zenkevicius said he intended the PRT to operate in Chaghcharan throughout the winter in order to maintain credibility with the local residents and to avoid having to rebuild their facilities from year to year. Zenkevicius's main concern regarding timing is the GOL's dependence on the establishment of a fully functional forward support base in Herat by the time the Lithuanians are in-theater. Lithuanian advance elements will be on the ground in Kabul and Herat by early May to coordinate with ISAF and contractors.

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Deployment Size  
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[1](#)4. (C) Zenkevicius told us he plans to deploy a contingent of upwards of 100 troops, possibly increasing the number as the mission progresses. The MOD has asked the Lithuanian Parliament (Seimas) to raise the current ceiling of 70 troops deployable in Afghanistan to 150. MFA POLAD designee Danius Baublys, who has followed this initiative, said he expects the Seimas to take up the authorizing bill the week of April [1](#)4. Vaclov Stankevic and Rasa Jukneviene, respectively Chair and Deputy of the Seimas NATO Commission, expressed solid commitment to Lithuania's playing an active role in NATO operations, and voice support for the PRT, which Stankevic termed a "responsible and honorable task."

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## Building a PRT

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15. (U) Returning from their reconnaissance mission better informed about the PRT site's challenges and resource limitations, the GOL revised its list of resource requirements. The list, which the GOL will present to SHAPE and which we faxed April 4 to EUR and PM, represents the complete needs assessment of the full scale PRT. The list details Lithuania's projected needs for strategic airlift for deployment and sustainment of the PRT; personnel equipment and capabilities to maintain the airfield; and equipment for the PRT and base camp operations. It also outlines training requirements for specialized drivers and mechanics and for a tactical air control party. The resident U.S. Cubic representative, the defense contractor that advises the MOD, accompanied the GOL team to Chaghcharan and helped develop the list. He explained that the list is a compendium, and acknowledges that it includes some items Lithuania has already requested through other channels. (More complete evaluation of the list will follow septel.)

16. (C) Zenkevicius said he would build the PRT base camp using local materials (stone) and local labor, and agreed with Metrisko on the value of leaving behind a useful facility when the PRT withdraws. MFA Director of Security Policy Kestutis Jankauskas raised a potential problem, noting that, although the recon team had identified a site for the base camp, they had been unable to determine ownership of the land. Metrisko cautioned against beginning construction before identifying the owner, to forestall any claims to the completed structures. (NOTE: With no diplomatic mission in Kabul, the GOL may need assistance in securing title to the property.) Zenkevicius described the forward support base and winter conditions as his biggest concerns, and outlined his priorities as construction of shelter, storage, and food preparation facilities for the PRT base. Metrisko cautioned the GOL not to rely on availability of contractors, construction know-how, or materials, and advised them to plan for delays.

17. (C) Metrisko told MFA Undersecretary Dalius Cekuolis that "Lithuania's presence will be the model by which local residents of Chaghcharan judge the world." He suggested that Zenkevicius initiate civil activities as soon after arrival as possible, and not focus exclusively on constructing the camp. Metrisko further suggested the team include members, either from the military or other agencies, with locally appropriate (if not essential) skills, including animal husbandry, tree planting, sanitation, construction and carpentry, automotive mechanics, and engineering, who could be of service both to the PRT and to the community. He warned against minimizing the difficulties of procuring and storing essential supplies, including adequate stores of fuel and water, should the PRT be unable to keep the airstrip open during the winter. Metrisko advocated beginning operations with a small deployment, and expanding the numbers and the base camp in the future. Jankauskas told us, April 2, that the GOL is considering adopting Metrisko's recommendations and initially deploying two mobile units.

## Building Public Support

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18. (C) Local officials told us the PRT mission clearly establishes Lithuania's new position in the international arena, moving, as MP Jukneviene said, "from a nation that receives support to one that offers it." Jukneviene and Stankevicius identified a lack of public awareness or understanding of this new role, and are eager to explore ideas for engaging the community in the country's overseas commitments. They discussed the possibility of establishing a Sister Cities program between Lithuanian and Ghawr towns, linking Lithuanian and Afghan schools through contribution of educational materials, and bringing Afghans to Lithuania for study trips or summer camps. We also suggested that troops returning from PRT assignments could be made available to talk about the work they did and how it affected the lives of the Afghan people. MOD officials also recognize that this deployment could strain military families, and looked to us to learn about the extensive support structure on which U.S. military families rely.

## The Road Ahead

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19. (C) To ensure that planning for the PRT involves all GOL elements, Norkus said that Lithuania will convene an interagency coordinating council, patterning it on the Euro-Atlantic Commission that had orchestrated Lithuania's preparations for NATO membership. (We understand that the MFA may lead this council.) In mid-April, Lithuania will also host a force generation meeting with PRT partners.

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Comment

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110. (C) The reconnaissance mission to Chaghcharan provided a reality check for Lithuanian PRT planners, but it did not dissuade them from taking on this ambitious mission. Metrisko's visit and assignment to the PRT was an important step in progression of the planners' learning curve. Already on the ground in Afghanistan, Metrisko could be of considerable use to the Lithuanians if he remains either in Herat or Kabul until initial operations begin. In either location, he might conveniently address GOL questions, identify resources and contacts, and generally smooth the way for the arrival of the PRT advance, who will have precious little time to waste if they are to meet their current timeline.

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